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SHIRLEY PLANTATION IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

A Historical, Architectural, and Archaeological Study

by THEODORE R. REINHART and JUDITH A. HABICHT*

SHIRLEY plantation in Charles City County has one of the finest assemblages of brick buildings from the colonial period in the United States. Its stately three-story mansion on the terraced north bank of the James River dominates four large, symmetrically arranged forecourt dependencies, with a stable and two smaller buildings nearby. In spite of its well-preserved architecture, however, Shirley has been the most problematic of the James River plantations in terms of architectural analysis and dating.

Three factors have contributed to the difficulty of establishing the history of construction at Shirley. The first, and most important, is the lack of documentary evidence. The Charles City County records were destroyed in the nineteenth century, and the Carter family papers make only vague references to construction and repair, which are open to various interpretations. Second, the unique style of the mansion, with its mansard roof and two-story porticoes, complicated by alterations to both the exterior and the interior, has made attempts to date the buildings on stylistic analysis very difficult. Finally, although the family continuity in ownership of the plantation has provided a rich source of oral tradition and history, it also has served as an obstacle to objective study, fixing in the minds of researchers certain misconceptions which have caused contradictory evidence to be overlooked or misinterpreted.

There have been three substantive studies of Shirley plantation in the twentieth century. The first was the work of Thomas Tileston Waterman, whose research is most often cited as the basis for opinions on the dating, style, and precedents for the Shirley mansion and dependencies.[1] In 1967 Catherine M. Lynn completed a master's thesis in which she carefully examined the Carter family papers and the Shirley architecture and was able to greatly expand our knowledge of the plantation. Her most significant contribution was the argument for a circa 1738 date for the construction of the Shirley mansion.[2] Unfortunately, the thesis was never published, al-

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[1] Waterman, *The Mansions of Virginia, 1706-1776* (Chapel Hill, 1945), passim, esp. pp. 346-59.

[2] Lynn, "Shirley Plantation: A History" (M.A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1967).

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Courtesy of the College of William and Mary

Aerial view of Shirley plantation showing the mansion and forecourt buildings (facing west)

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though a summary did appear in article form.[3] Finally, in 1979 and 1980 the College of William and Mary conducted archaeological excavations at the plantation, under the direction of the senior author, which revealed new evidence regarding the construction and modification of the Shirley buildings.[4] This evidence has provided new insights to Shirley plantation in the eighteenth century.

The land on which the Shirley buildings now stand was patented by Edward Hill in 1660. It passed through his son, Edward Hill II, to his grandson, Edward Hill III, and eventually through his great-granddaughter, Elizabeth Hill, to John Carter, whom she married in 1723. When John Carter, the eldest son of Robert "King" Carter of Corotoman, died in 1742, he left Shirley to his widow until her death. She lived there, at first alone and later with her second husband, Bowler Cocke, until her death in 1769 or 1771. In 1771 or 1772, Charles Carter, the son of John and Elizabeth, moved from Corotoman to take over control of Shirley. He lived there until his death in 1806.[5] These are the possible overseers of major construction efforts at Shirley.

In both its style and magnitude, Shirley seems to reflect the Carter family legacy to Virginia architecture, as seen in other eighteenth-century plantations such as Sabine Hall, Nomini Hall, Rippon Hall, Cleve, and Corotoman. The style of the buildings at Shirley also belies the possibility that they were the original buildings of the Hill family. Both John and Charles Carter had the resources, opportunity, and motivation to undertake extensive building efforts at the plantation. Records which cite the ordering of building materials and workmen exist for both father and son. However, positively linking any of these references directly to work being done at Shirley has been impossible. In addition, a widow or a man with no legal title to the land would hardly have undertaken such an elaborate building scheme, and there is no documentary evidence to suggest that either Elizabeth Hill or Bowler Cocke was responsible for any of the major buildings at Shirley today. Although it is possible to attribute the construction of all the major dependencies and the mansion at Shirley to either John or Charles Carter or both, the attribution of particular buildings to father or son and the determination of the sequence of building have been very troublesome and often hypothetical.

[3] Catherine Lynn Frangiamore, "Shirley Plantation in Charles City County, Virginia," *Antiques,* CIII (1973), 340-50.

[4] Theodore R. Reinhart, ed., *The Archaeology of Shirley Plantation* (Charlottesville, forthcoming) (hereafter cited as *Archaeology of Shirley Plantation*).

[5] Lynn, "Shirley Plantation," p. 66.

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Courtesy of the College of William and Mary

West facade of the Shirley mansion (facing south)

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Waterman's chronology of the Shirley buildings was greatly influenced by Carter family traditions. These traditions maintain that another, older house, known as the "Hill House" after its supposed builder, Edward Hill I, II, or III, once stood to the south of the mansion. That a structure did stand there is well substantiated. A drawing made in 1851 by Frederick E. Church shows the present mansion with this "Hill House" at its side and what are now the two westernmost dependencies east of it. Moreover, it was still standing during the early lifetime of Mrs. Marion Carter Oliver, the occupant of Shirley at the time of Waterman's investigations.[6] The building was demolished in 1868, and the materials reused to construct Upper Shirley. The contract for this work still exists.[7]

Based on this information, Waterman maintained that the "Hill House" was the main residence at Shirley in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. He believed that John Carter supervised the construction of the four forecourt dependencies between 1735 and his death in 1742. These buildings were supposedly laid out so as to be in line with a new mansion, which according to Waterman, was not started before John's death. He believed that the present mansion was constructed by Charles Carter sometime after his mother's death in 1769 and that the "Hill House" then became an auxiliary outbuilding, not in keeping with the rigid Georgian symmetry of the plantation scheme.[8] This was mostly conjecture, with very little basis in historical or architectural evidence. However, Waterman's work provided the basic framework on which most subsequent research of Shirley has been built.

Catherine Lynn believed that the mansion and forecourt dependencies were constructed by John Carter. As evidence for this she cited several references from Carter's correspondence during 1738 and 1739 to construction he was apparently overseeing and financing. But as Lynn admits, where this construction was taking place is not always clear.[9] However, an English traveler, J. F. D. Smyth, writing about his trip up the James River in the 1770s, credited John Carter with the construction of the standing buildings on the plantation at the time of his visit:

> The buildings are of brick, large, convenient, and expensive, but now falling to decay; they were erected at a great charge, by Mr. [Charles] Carter's father

[6] Waterman, *Mansions*, pp. 175-76.
[7] Lynn, "Shirley Plantation," pp. 210-12.
[8] Waterman, *Mansions*, pp. 176-78.
[9] Lynn, "Shirley Plantation," pp. 58-61.

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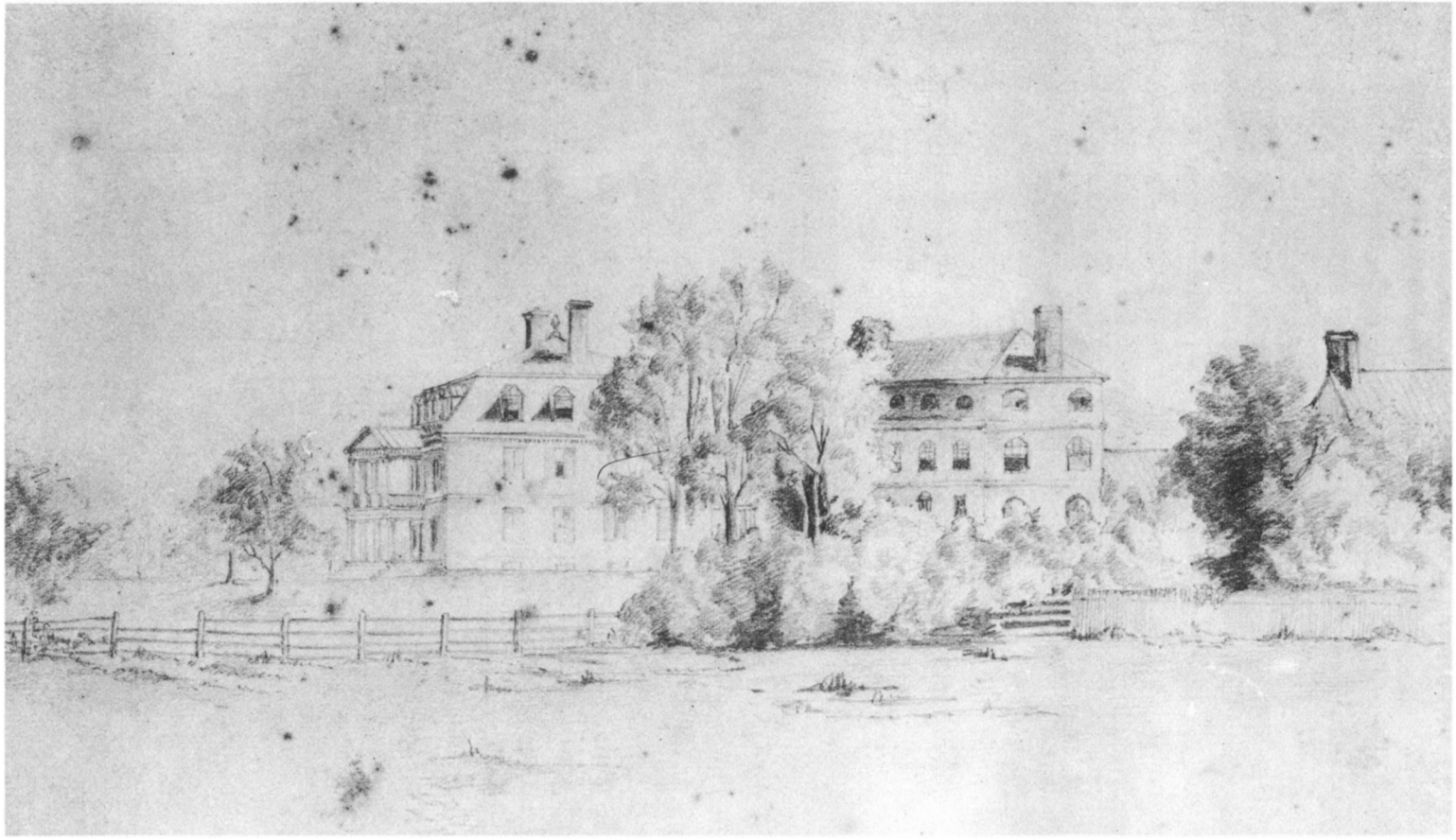

Courtesy of the College of William and Mary

Drawing of the Shirley mansion and south flanking dependency by Frederick E. Church (1851)

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> [John Carter], who was secretary of the colony, and this was his favourite seat of residence.[10]

A surviving map from 1742, entitled "A Plan of Shirley Tract Containing 640 Acres of high land laid off by Sackvil Brewer Surveyr. of Henrico Anno Dom 1742," locates and names several plantation buildings. Across the section where the mansion now stands is written: "This part contains the Orchards, Gardings [*sic*], Park, and all the Houses except those called the Great Quarters." Within this same section appears a letter "I" which is identified as marking "The Great House." [11] This is evidence that some substantial building or buildings were at Shirley at the time of John Carter's death. Lynn believed these to have been the present mansion and the four forecourt dependencies. She states that:

> The symmetrical relationship of forecourt structures to mansion house indicates that all of these buildings were placed with the others in mind.... The brickwork, style of architecture, and plan of arrangement of these buildings seem to place them within a relatively close period of construction.[12]

Lynn's argument was hampered by her inability to adequately explain the "Hill House." Unlike Waterman, she was not totally convinced of its seventeenth-century construction date. In addition, she found no evidence that the structure originally resembled Bacon's Castle or that it was remodeled in 1725 to the appearance shown in the Church drawing.[13] Lynn states that "it is perfectly possible that the older house pictured in the sketch [the "Hill House"] was built early in the eighteenth century." [14] Nevertheless, she was faced with the dilemma that references to "The Great House" at Shirley in connection with John Carter might have been referring to the "Hill House" and not to the present mansion.

In the summer of 1979, archaeological excavations were undertaken at the site of the "Hill House" in order to attempt to answer the questions about its relationship to other buildings at Shirley. What was discovered greatly altered the generally accepted ideas about the Shirley building complex in the eighteenth century and the chronology of its construction. Just south of the mansion directly below the surface of the ground was found the foundation of a brick structure sixty feet long (north-south) and twenty-

[10] Smyth, "Smyth's Travels in Virginia, in 1773," *Virginia Historical Register and Literary Companion*, VI (1853), 19.
[11] Lynn, "Shirley Plantation," pp. 62-64.
[12] Ibid., pp. 185-86.
[13] Ibid., p. 5; Waterman, *Mansions*, pp. 175-76.
[14] Lynn, "Shirley Plantation," p. 7.

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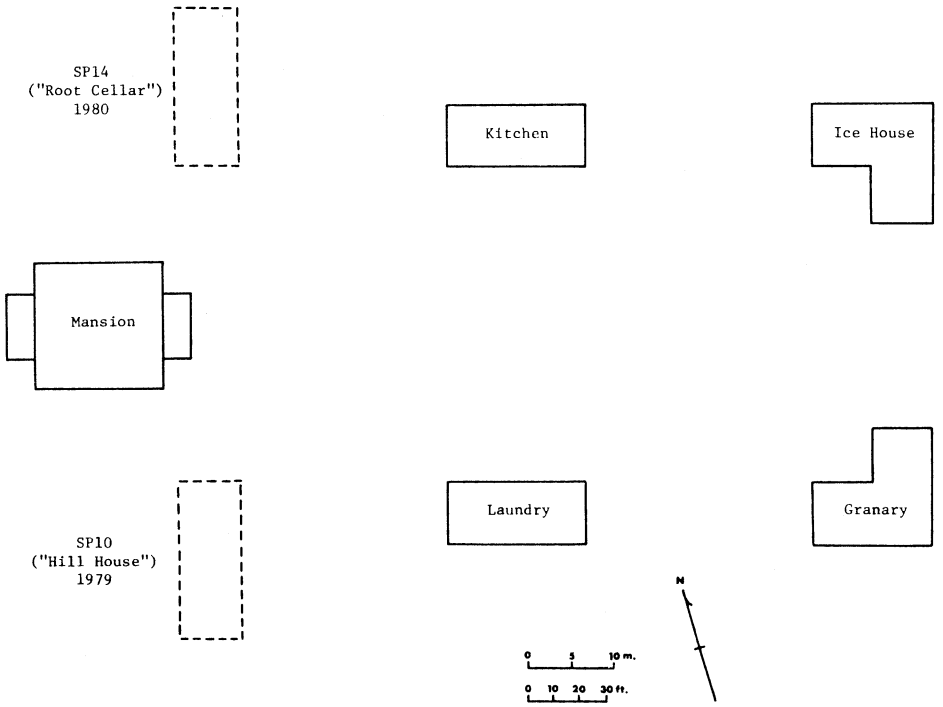

Scale plan of the Shirley mansion, flanking dependencies, and forecourt buildings. The flanking dependencies are defined by dashed lines and labeled with their archaeological designations and the year of excavation.

four feet wide (east-west), with a full basement divided into a typical hall-passage-parlor plan. The remains of a wine cellar with a barrel vault were discovered in the north end of the basement. From architectural remains and associated artifacts, this was obviously not a seventeenth-century structure. Nevertheless, it might have been assumed, as Lynn feared, that the "Hill House" was in fact "The Great House" of John Carter's time, had not another significant discovery been made that same year.

To the north of the mansion is an unobtrusive ivy-covered feature traditionally known and labeled as the "Root Cellar." This site has been ignored in the earlier studies of Shirley; neither Waterman nor Lynn made any reference to it. However, examination of this feature near the close of the 1979 field season revealed an unfilled segment of a basement, complete with an intact barrel vault, identical to the north end of the "Hill House." It is the south end of a basement in the mirror image of the "Hill House."

This was a startling discovery. All of the scholarship done on Shirley up to this time had been based on the assumptions that the "Hill House" had

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predated the mansion and its forecourt dependencies and that it had not been part of the overall Georgian scheme of these buildings. It is now apparent that the "Hill House" was a flanking dependency of the mansion, postdating or roughly contemporaneous with that structure, and that it was balanced, in Georgian fashion, by a nearly identical structure, whose existence had been lost to recent memory.

In the summer of 1980 archaeological excavations were undertaken at the "Root Cellar" site in order to more completely define that structure and to recover an artifact sample from it. In addition, an exploratory trench through a depression southwest of the mansion unearthed the remains of extensive alterations to the mansion dating to the 1770s. Testing was also done at two corners of the mansion to attempt to verify Lynn's dating of the mansion through exploration of its builders' trench. The information derived through these archaeological excavations can now be added to the earlier knowledge to present new understanding and hypotheses about the construction, original appearance, and subsequent alterations of the major buildings of eighteenth-century Shirley.

The three-story mansion measures forty-eight feet five inches by forty-eight feet eight inches (above the water table) and is five bays long (north-south) and four bays deep (east-west), with a mansard roof terminated by a pineapple finial. At the break of the roof slopes are two tall interior chimneys with molded brick caps. The exterior walls are brick, laid in English bond below grade and Flemish bond, with scattered glaze headers, above. The water table marks the division between the full basement and the first floor. It is finished off by a row of quarter round ovolo headers. A five-member belt course of ovolos, inverted coves, plain gauged brick, and cyma reversa bricks marks the second floor; the roofline has a deep denticulated cornice. The windows are over large: Those of the first and second story are twelve lights (panes) over twelve. The mansard roof is pierced by closely packed pedimented dormers on all four sides. The east and west facades are dominated by two-story, three-bay-wide pedimented porticoes that mark the central axis.

The interior floor plan of Shirley is basically a square divided into four major spaces on each floor. The rooms on the ground floor are arranged so that they balance diagonally. The large northeast room serves as both an entrance hall and a stair hall, with the stairs off to the right. This staircase is unusual in that the third level of risers to the second floor is not buttressed from below by a wall, and it has not been determined exactly how this part of the stairs is supported. The second floor reverts back to a traditional double-

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pile plan with central hall, stair hall, and three rooms. Waterman cited the original plan of the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg as the source of the mansion's design.[15] Lynn found another possible source for the plan in *Vitruvius Britannicus;* the "General Plan of Mr. Rooth's House at Epson" is virtually identical to that of the Shirley mansion.[16] Rosewell (built 1726-30) has a similar interior arrangement, with diagonal symmetry and side stairs.

The excavation of two small sections of the builders' trench during the summer of 1980 supports Lynn's circa 1738 date for the construction of the mansion.[17] However, the mansion today is much altered from that conceived and built by John Carter. A number of references suggest that many of these alterations were undertaken by Charles Carter. A neighbor of Carter's, Richard Adams, wrote to his brother Thomas in London on 30 September 1771 concerning work at Shirley: "Our Friend C. Carter . . . will remove to Shirley as soon as he can gett the House repaired wch he expects will be done in about 12 or 13 mo's." [18]

In the *Virginia Gazette* of 14 January 1775, an advertisement appeared, signed by Charles Carter, who sought the services of "shop-joiners . . . capable of executing the best wainscott work." [19] The depression southwest of the mansion was filled with architectural material found in association with artifacts dating to the third quarter of the eighteenth century.[20] These are undoubtedly the remains of Charles Carter's renovation of the mansion, and examination of these remains in conjunction with stylistic evidence reveals much about the alterations of the 1770s.

Lynn has shown that stylistically much of the interior woodwork in the mansion dates from the late eighteenth century.[21] This evidence and the 1775 advertisement for shop-joiners, along with the remains of wall plaster (including painted plaster from around the doors) and lath nails from the deposits in the depression, suggest that much of the mansion's interior as it exists today was executed during the residence of Charles Carter.

Waterman believed that the two-story porticoes were original to the mansion.[22] However, Lynn's removal of paving stones from the west porch

[15] Waterman, *Mansions,* pp. 349-50.
[16] Lynn, "Shirley Plantation," p. 131.
[17] Theodore R. Reinhart, Judith A. Habicht, and Thomas A. Reitz, "Dating the Shirley Mansion," in *Archaeology of Shirley Plantation.*
[18] Richard Adams to Thomas Adams, 30 Sept. 1771 ("Letters of Richard Adams [1] to Thomas Adams," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography,* XXII [1914], 387).
[19] Lynn, "Shirley Plantation," pp. 83-84.
[20] Theodore R. Reinhart, " 'Raising the Roof' at Shirley," in *Archaeology of Shirley Plantation.*
[21] Lynn, "Shirley Plantation," pp. 157-58.
[22] Waterman, *Mansions,* p. 346.

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revealed the brick base of an earlier porch or stoop supported by a brick vault. Since the door into the second-story porch had earlier been a window, this original porch was only one story in height.[23]

Architectural material excavated from the depression provides some clues about the appearance of the original entranceway. Found in the depression were fragments of molded portland sandstone steps that would have capped the vaulted brick base. The shapes of the stone fragments suggest that the original steps were straight, with ends flaring to form terminal swirls, similar to those found today at the Wren Building in Williamsburg. Also discovered in the depression were several molded bricks which appear to be the remains of a highly elaborate door treatment with possibly a carved brick pediment, cornices, architrave, and flanking pilasters.[24] Elaborate doorways of this type once existed at Rosewell in Gloucester County; one is still extant at Christ Church (1732) in Lancaster County.[25]

The presence of this material in the depression deposits, along with the fact that the door treatment on the present porch matches that of the interior credited to Charles Carter, suggests that the pedimented porticoes were constructed circa 1771-75. These porticoes are very Jeffersonian and, by derivation, Palladian in essence. They compare well with those Marcus Whiffen describes as having been placed on the Capitol in Williamsburg in 1770 and with those Jefferson originally had constructed at Monticello.[26] The overall late Georgian aspect which the addition of these porticoes lent to the mansion convinced Waterman it was constructed after 1769. Lynn believed the porticoes dated from 1831, because of references to work being done on them that year.[27] However, these references were most probably for extensive repairs to them rather than for their construction. In fact, the columns appear to have all been replaced and a granite base added, possibly at that time. The original columns were probably Doric on the bottom and Ionic on top, which would have been more in keeping with the classical principles of Andrea Palladio. The present columns are of the Tuscan order on both top and bottom and are neoclassical in nature.

Whether the mansard roof of the mansion is original has been the subject of much discussion. Oral tradition holds that Charles Carter raised the roof

[23] Lynn, "Shirley Plantation," p. 145.

[24] Letter from Edward A. Chappell, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, to Reinhart, 30 Oct. 1980.

[25] Hugh Morrison, *Early American Architecture, from the First Colonial Settlements to the National Period* (New York, 1952), pp. 349-50; Waterman, *Mansions*, p. 115.

[26] Whiffen, *The Public Buildings of Williamsburg, Colonial Capital of Virginia: An Architectural History* (Williamsburg, 1958), p. 139.

[27] Lynn, "Shirley Plantation," p. 148.

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at Shirley. However, Lynn found no structural or documentary evidence that the roof was not built at the same time as the rest of the mansion.[28] Mansard roofs were rare in the first half of the eighteenth century but not unknown. A. E. Richardson and H. Donaldson Eberlein illustrate a three-bay English house dated to 1710, with a mansard roof pierced by dormers, which is very similar in appearance to Shirley.[29] Most other mansard roofs in America appear to date after 1750. However, they are not generally as heavy and do not rise at the steep pitch seen at Shirley. The overall proportion of the roof to the wall height, the steep angle of the rise of the roof, and the prominence of the dormer windows all suggest an affinity to earlier eighteenth-century houses, such as the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg or Westover.[30]

The profusion of ceramic roofing tiles found in the depression deposits indicates that this roofing material was removed by Charles Carter at the time of his major renovations. It is uncertain what replaced these ceramic tiles; the family tradition says lead. This could not be verified, although lead flashing was discovered throughout the excavations around the house and flanking dependencies. Whatever this new roof was, it was replaced in the early nineteenth century by wood shingles, in 1845 by tin, and finally in 1966 by the present slate roof.[31]

Thus, at its core, the present mansion is "The Great House" attributed to John Carter and dates to circa 1738. However, in the 1770s his son, Charles, made extensive alterations to the structure by redoing the interior woodwork, by adding the two-story, pedimented porticoes, and by replacing the ceramic roofing tile. The porticoes were apparently altered again in 1831 to the form they have today.

The manison's two flanking dependencies presumably were nearly identical in appearance and were constructed at the same time. Archaeological evidence in conjunction with the 1851 drawing by Frederick Church allows a reconstruction of their original appearance. The excavated foundations reveal the remains of two brick structures, sixty feet long by twenty-four feet wide, with the long axes parallel to the east facade of the mansion. Each building had a full basement with two crosswalls and end chimney supports, delineating a basic hall-passage-parlor plan. The basement rooms closest to the mansion in each building were covered by full-width barrel

[28] Ibid., p. 151.
[29] Richardson and Eberlein, *The Smaller English House of the Later Renaissance, 1660-1830: An Account of Its Design, Plan, and Details* (New York, 1925), p. 9.
[30] Lynn, "Shirley Plantation," p. 156.
[31] Ibid.; Reinhart, " 'Raising the Roof,' " in *Archaeology of Shirley Plantation.*

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vaults, presumably for wine cellars. The wine cellar in the north structure has survived intact and is what has been misnamed the "Root Cellar." At the opposite ends, bulkhead entrances with brick steps descended into the cellars between the brick chimney supports. Such an entrance was excavated at the "Hill House" (south flanking dependency); and the entrance for one was found at the "Root Cellar" site (north flanking dependency), although the steps appear to have been rubbed out.[32]

Like the mansion, these structures were laid in English bond below grade and Flemish bond above. As can be seen from the Church drawing, the south dependency and, by inference, also the north were two-and-one-half-story buildings with end chimneys and hipped roofs. Ceramic roofing tiles, similar to those originally used on the mansion, apparently covered the roofs, as these tiles were found in the fill of both basements and are suggested by the drawing. Large molded portland sandstone blocks found in the destruction level of the north dependency have been identified as chimney caps.[33] Waterman describes similar blocks as having been present in the loose architectural debris which marked the site of the south dependency when he visited Shirley.[34]

From the drawing these flanking buildings appear to have been five bays long and two bays wide. The windows seem to resemble those on the standing kitchen and laundry with flat arches and segmental soffits. Rubbed bricks, possibly from these segmental window soffits, were found in the destruction layers of both structures. The windows also may have had sandstone sills, as such fragments were found at the north dependency excavations. It has not been possible to determine whether the doors had flat or segmental arches or were surrounded by molded brick elements as on the mansion. The remains of portland sandstone blocks, which may represent molded pilaster bases, were found at both sites. In addition, fragments of molded sandstone steps, similar to those found in the depression deposits, suggest that the flanking dependencies had these at least on their front or river facade. The remains of less elaborate limestone steps, similar to those on the present kitchen, were found in the destruction layer of the north dependency and might have been used on the rear or land facade.

Two string courses are seen in the Church drawing dividing the floors. Cyma reversa and plain gauged stretchers and ovolo headers were all found

[32] Theodore R. Reinhart, "The 'Hill House' at Shirley Plantation," and Judith A. Habicht, "The 'Root Cellar' at Shirley Plantation," in *Archaeology of Shirley Plantation*.

[33] Communication of Edward A. Chappell with Reinhart, 29 Oct. 1980.

[34] Waterman, *Mansions*, p. 176.

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in the excavations, suggesting that these string courses were complex and similar to that on the mansion. The ovolo headers also may have been used for the top of the water table, as on the mansion.

Excavation of sections of the builders' trench at the north dependency revealed artifacts dating to the first half of the eighteenth century. Although these provide only a rough date after which the dependency may have been built, these flanking buildings seem to date to the same time as the mansion (circa 1738). The evidence from the builders' trenches and the unity of design and placement indicate that they were conceived and constructed as a unified whole.

The dimensions of the mansion (forty-eight by forty-eight feet) and the flanking dependencies (sixty by twenty-four feet) are all based on multiples of twelve feet. The distance between the buildings is thirty-six feet, also a multiple of twelve. An examination of the ratio of building to interspatial distances reveals the proportions of 5:3:4:3:5 or A:B:C:B:A. Moreover, if a line is drawn through the central axis of the mansion from the end of the porch on the west facade ninety feet to a point bisecting a 240-foot line drawn along the east facades of the flanking dependencies, it forms the common side of two mirror-image right triangles, based on a thirty-foot unit. These rigid and rhythmic proportions were inspired by the classical architectural principles of the Renaissance and indicate a high degree of sophistication in both the design and the execution of the plan of these three buildings. As discussed below, the forecourt, although well balanced and symmetrically arranged, does not follow through with the precise plan established for the mansion and its flanking dependencies. This suggests that these three buildings formed the original core of the plantation, with the forecourt being a later addition. If this was the case, the flanking dependencies probably functioned as the original kitchen and office, later being converted to chambers when the forecourt was built.

Although the flanking dependencies were nearly identical in appearance and were built at the same time, their subsequent histories differ greatly. The history of the north dependency is not well known, although several references to it have been found. Frank and Cortelle Hutchins, in describing the Shirley forecourt in the early part of this century, state:

> The village effect produced by the grouped buildings must have been even more striking in colonial times; for then the manor-house was flanked by two more large brick buildings, forming what might be called detached wings. One of these was still standing up to the time of the Civil War.[35]

[35] Hutchins and Hutchins, *Houseboating on a Colonial Waterway* (Boston, 1910), p. 251.

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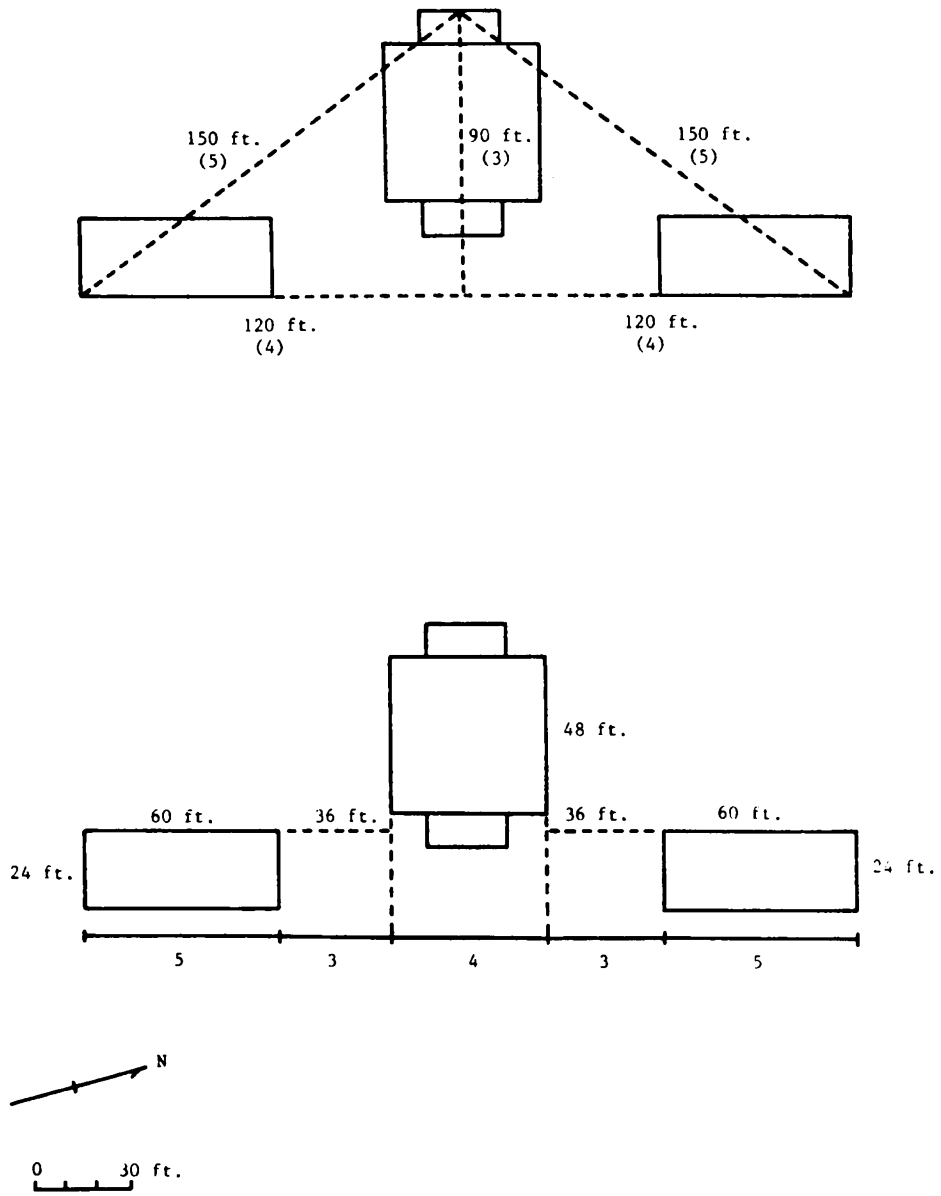

Building dimensions and interspatial distances of the Shirley mansion and flanking dependencies showing their classical arrangement

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In their 1910 publication on colonial architecture in Maryland and Virginia, Lewis A. Coffin, Jr., and Arthur C. Holden include a plan of the mansion and forecourt buildings at Shirley. In the area of the south flanking dependency they have a hatched rectangle labeled "Chambers (Demolished)"; and in the area of the north flanking dependency they have a hatched rectangle labeled "Chambers (Not Completed)." [36] The presence of wall plaster, roofing tile, window glass, and nineteenth-century gutter supports in the destruction level of this north dependency, however, would seem to indicate that the structure was indeed completed. Finally, a map from a survey of the plantation in 1820 shows the north dependency as simply an unexplained rectangle with a dot in it, while the mansion and the south dependency are drawn to resemble houses. This suggests the north dependency was abandoned and in some state of ruin, perhaps due to fire, by that time. The artifacts from the destruction level of the structure indicate that it was torn down in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and the remaining foundation was filled in with trash and clay. The vaulted wine cellar portion of the basement, however, was preserved, apparently for use as storage or as the misnomer suggests, a root cellar.

The south flanking dependency, the so-called "Hill House," is somewhat better known and documented. It stood unaltered until 1868, when contractors were hired to dismantle it and to use the bricks in building the house at Upper Shirley.[37] The first known misidentification of this dependency as an older building, predating the mansion, is a map made by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in 1931, which locates it as the "Site of Original House." During the 1920s knowledge of architectural history developed to the point where it was recognized that the present Shirley mansion could not have been the original home of the Edward Hills in the seventeenth century, as had earlier been supposed. This prompted a search for an older house. The south dependency, which had only been demolished some fifty or so years before, was still vaguely fixed in the minds of the occupants of the plantation at that time, and it became the choice for the predecessor to the standing mansion. The forgotten north flanking dependency would not fit into this new scheme, and the overwhelming physical evidence of its existence was ignored. This interesting illustration of the bias of human perception is one of the most fascinating aspects of the study.

The four buildings of the Shirley forecourt, in design, execution, and

[36] Coffin and Holden, *Brick Architecture of the Colonial Period in Maryland and Virginia* (New York, 1919), p. 20.

[37] Lynn, "Shirley Plantation," pp. 210-12.

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placement, represent a unified architectural entity, linked to but distinct from the mansion and the flanking dependencies. The placement and design of these buildings form, with the mansion (and earlier with the flanking dependencies) an enclosed courtyard.[38]

The brickwork on these buildings is in Flemish bond with scattered glazed headers. The window and door arches are flat with segmental soffits, similar to those of Rosewell, the Nelson House in Yorktown, and, most probably, the flanking dependencies. As Lynn notes, unlike the mansion, these buildings have rubbed brick window arches and rubbed brick around the doors and at the corners.[39]

The two rectangular buildings at the west end of the forecourt are approximately seventy-nine feet east of the flanking dependencies and measure fifty-two feet seven inches long by twenty-three feet two inches deep. These dimensions and interspatial distances are very different from those which form the classic rhythmic proportions of the mansion and flanking dependencies. The buildings are five bays across the facades, two stories in height, and without basements. The first floor windows are nine lights over nine, while those on the second floor are six lights over six, except for the center window which is eight over eight. This placement of a broader window over the doorway also is found on Rosewell and the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg. The buildings were constructed on a basic hall-passage-parlor plan with end chimneys, similar to the plan of the flanking dependencies. The roofs, which are terminated by a sudden splay at the eaves, are pitched with gables decorated by sophisticated moldings and dentils. In overall appearance, these buildings bear strong resemblances to both Berkeley and the Nelson House in Yorktown.[40]

The buildings are known today as the kitchen (north) and the laundry (south). In the case of the kitchen, the name undoubtedly reflects its eighteenth-century function. However, the laundry probably originally functioned as the plantation office, being converted into a laundry in the nineteenth century.

The two L-shaped buildings at the east end of the forecourt are forty-three feet two inches on both their long sides and have pedimented gables

[38] Rather than being a forecourt, in the eighteenth century this was a backcourt. The river side was the front of the mansion, and most travel to Shirley was by river to a dock in front of that entrance. In addition, the mansion with its large flanking dependencies could only be seen with advantage on the river side. The forecourt became such only with the destruction of the flanking dependencies and the improvement of land travel.

[39] Lynn, "Shirley Plantation," pp. 177-78.

[40] Ibid.

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Courtesy of the College of William and Mary

South facade of the Shirley kitchen (facing north)

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on both ends. These buildings have no fireplaces and were apparently intended for use as storehouses or granaries. The north structure is built over an icehouse.

Herbert A. Claiborne believed that, on the basis of differences in the treatment of brickwork and in brick sizes between the mansion and the forecourt buildings, the latter appear to have been built slightly later than the mansion.[41] This evidence, when added to the fact that the forecourt buildings do not appear to have been tied into the well-orchestrated plan of the mansion and flanking dependencies, would seem to indicate that the forecourt represents a somewhat later addition to the plantation complex. No documentary or archaeological evidence has yet been found that dates the construction of the forecourt. However, it quite likely was part of the building program undertaken at Shirley during the 1770s by Charles Carter.

Recent archaeological investigations have significantly contributed to the history and architectural study of Shirley plantation. The discovery that the so-called "Hill House" was not an older residence, but a flanking dependency with a duplicate on the opposite side of the mansion radically alters our understanding of the layout and design of the plantation in the eighteenth century. Examination of builders' trenches substantiates a date of circa 1738 for the construction of the mansion and these flanking dependencies. Architectural remains found in the depression deposits have provided additional data about alterations to the mansion during the third and fourth quarters of the eighteenth century and about the original appearance of the building.

With the new evidence, a reexamination of building dimensions and spatial distances reveals a sophisticated arrangement in classical proportions of the mansion and its flanking dependencies. This arrangement indicates that they were conceived and built as a unified whole by John Carter and that they formed the original core of the building complex at Shirley. Because the forecourt, although well planned and symmetrically arranged, does not tie into the arrangement, this gives weight to the argument that the forecourt was a later addition, most probably constructed under the direction of Charles Carter.

After the scholarship of Thomas Waterman, most architectural works have treated Shirley in conjunction with other late Georgian houses dating to the second half of the eighteenth century. However, with the exception of those features which represent later additions (i.e., the two-story, pedimented porticoes and the interior woodwork), Shirley bears little resem-

[41] Claiborne, *Comments on Virginia Brickwork before 1800* ([Portland, Maine], 1957), pp. 39-40.

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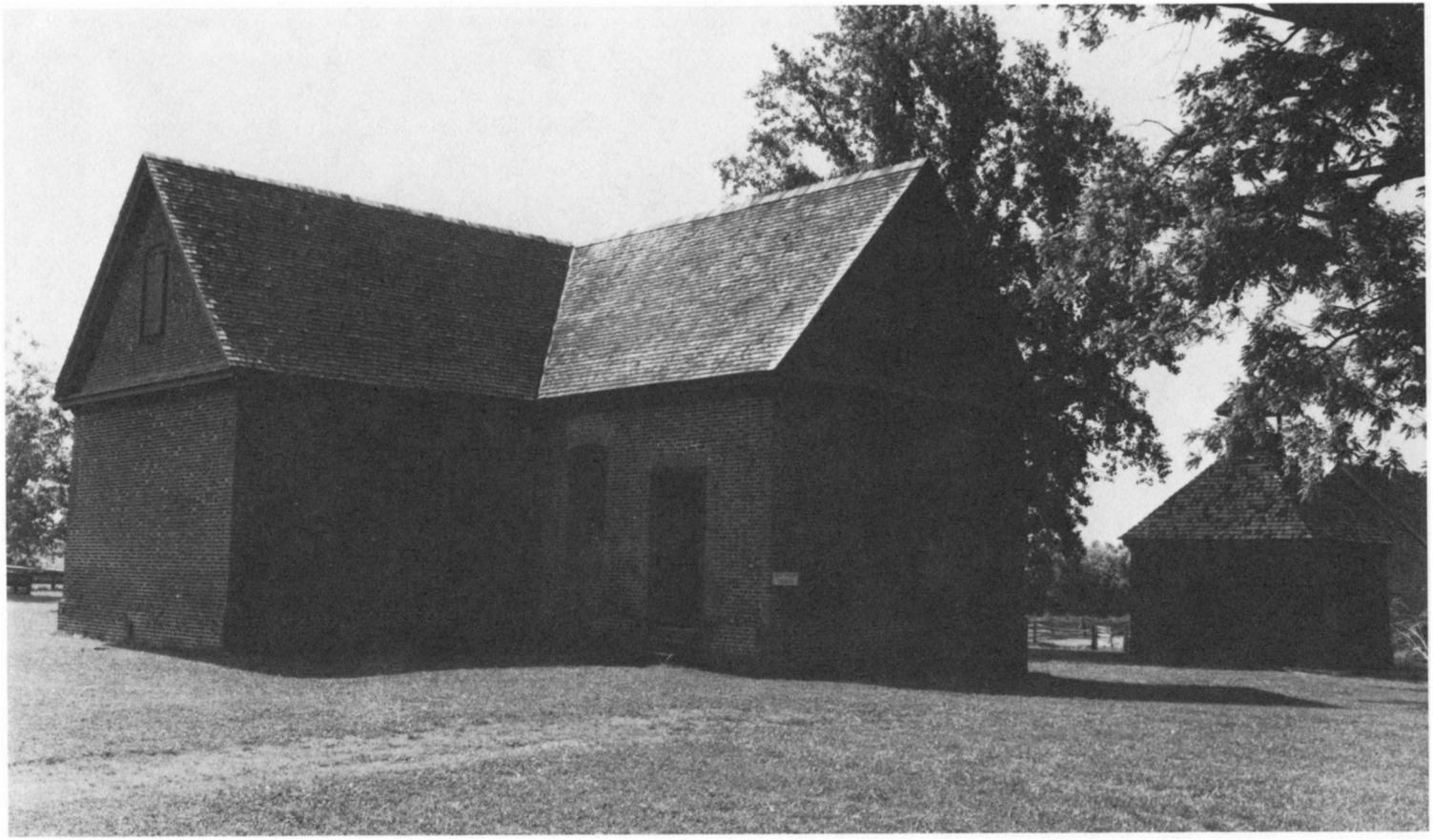

Courtesy of the College of William and Mary

North L-shaped Shirley forecourt building (facing southeast)

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blance to these later structures. The mansion finds its closest parallels in interior arrangement, architectural detail, and general design with the Governor's Palace and with Rosewell, both of which date to the first half of the eighteenth century. A greater understanding of the design of Shirley will no doubt result from its comparison with its proper contemporaries and from a greater appreciation of the Shirley mansion as one of the finest examples of early Georgian architecture to survive in Virginia.

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